

CHAPTER 6

Goat, Serpent, & Spirit—Surpassing Hariti

SYNOPSIS

Customarily the goddess appears as fleet-footed deer or as oracular parrot kissing her cheek, pecking lotus bud or fruit. Much of the animal symbolism with magical roots endeavors to break the evil spell of Mara. The goddess in early Buddhist art is twined with emblematic Makara, Mahakala, Torana, Srivatsa, and Triratna. The Triratna emblem spelled MA in Brahmi is composed of paired fish combined with lotus and the solar-lunar discs fundamental to faith in rebirth. Triratna is insignia of Srima Devata; goddess Lakshmi churned from the ocean like Venus stands on the Amrit Kalasa, the vessel holding Amrit of immortality and the lotus of rebirth. Heavenly Gajalakshmi and Nagalakshmi in the underworld are innovative forms of the goddess. Alongside is the eponymous character played by Hariti, the one who steals children, mysteriously worshiped as the giver of sons. The “Heart Ravishing” Hariti (Yid-phrog-Ma) in Tibetan culture is the Mother of Demons widely invoked in the reliquary stupa complexes. In Kushan South Asia the fertility goddess appears as a goat with her consort; goatskin aegis stamped on funerary sculpture and the hoof-shaped talismans in gold and silver are among the grave goods from Han China to Gandhara encompassing the Indus Valley. Response to the unprecedented material culture in South Asia demands input from multiple fields and involves morphology, anthropology, mythology, cosmology, and etymology.

For example, Hariti holding cornucopia resembles Demeter, the goddess of agricultural prosperity; her son Plutus denoting wealth resembles Kubera. Early Buddhist art widely represents the bond between Demeter and her daughter Persephone central to Eleusinian Mysteries linked to the agrarian cycle. Persephone abducted by Hades into the underworld, the land of the dead, manifests on ex-votos in her primary cult center in Chandraketurah and elsewhere. When Persephone was allowed to return for six months, with impending separation looming for the rest of the year, the joint worship of the mother and daughter in religious cult practices gave hope of revival, while annual rites brought a reunion with one’s ancestors. The contextual view of Demeter and Persephone unfolds a complex symbolic system related to Hindu rituals. The mother and daughter bond celebrated in literature and cult practices endure in the Autumnal Durga Puja followed by Lakshmi Puja celebrated by women following age-old rituals in West Bengal. Surely, Vrat Kathas hint Homeric Hymns that rejoice: “Queen of fragrant Eleusis, Giver of Earth’s good gifts, give me your grace, O Demeter. you, too, Persephone, fairest, lovely maiden, I offer a song for your favor.” It has to be borne in mind that goddess Lakshmi lustrated by elephants appeared for the first time in the Buddhist mortuary cult.

Greco-Buddhist Arcadia delivers *The Epic Dimensions in Buddhist Art*. One cannot deny the power of myth or underestimate the importance of the mass media, theatrics and performance, or the democracy in art, architecture, and the reliquary caskets that seemingly give an illusion of a single entity acknowledged as the Buddha. But the Greco-Buddhist mortuary cult has generated amazing allegories, signs, and symbols that diverge from and diversify into the core concerns of

regeneration that leaves the Buddha as an entity stranded on an island. It is entirely possible to write on anything other than the Buddha to create meaning from the countless artifacts. Conscious of this incongruity, Vidhya Dehejia holding onto the centrality of the Buddha in all things, has forcefully articulated the scheme of Aniconic and the Theory of Multivalent Functions. Susan Huntington amply argues to shed light on the contradictions in this dark-web.¹ Their arguments speak for themselves. Leaving their never-ending churnings aside, what comes up is the sole goal: The resurrection of the dead that gives purpose and meaning to the cult objects created for utmost efficacy. If Buddha was born six-hundred years earlier, the posthumous art program of the early Christian period has indeed succeeded to fulfill its primary function.



6.1 Androclus and the Lion offering plate, Schist, Ø 12 cm, Gandhara, 1st-2nd century CE (e-Auction)

6.2 Head of Yamantaka, the Destroyer of Death, Schist, Swat Valley, Pakistan, 2nd century CE

6.3 Yamantaka gold disc, Ø 4.1 cm, H 0.15 cm, W.10.5 gm, Oxus Treasure, 1st century CE

London: British Museum (123943) Findspot Takht-i-Kuwad, Tajikistan

Here we begin with an unlikely story carved on an offering plate coming from the vast necropolis of Gandhara. Androclus, a Roman slave who lived about the time of Tiberius (r. 14–37 CE) is the hero in the story told by Aulus Gellius (v. 14). Androclus stowed away from Ostia and took refuge from the cruelties of his master in a cave in North Africa. A lion entered the cave and showed him its injured paw, from which Androclus extracted a large thorn. Sadly, both were captured; the grateful animal later recognized him when Androclus was thrown to the wild beasts in the circus. Instead of attacking the lion began to caress him.² As a sign of divine intervention Androclus was set free – Yes, kindness is its reward. This is one kind of rebirth story among other rebirth stories bounding in the Buddhist scenery. An astute sculptor has illustrated “Androclus and the Lion” in the lunette threshold to achieve propitious rebirth. The exceptional libation plate is forked to metaphorically usher Hecate at the three-way crossroad guiding the transition. The cage bars contain the ferocious lion that could rip apart a group of men standing around the cage. But Androclus crouched behind the two spear-bearing soldiers knows that after being nursed back to health the lion rattling the cage is his softest cushion (6.1). Two men in the lead wearing a ring around the head like the corona of the sun concur: Service without expectation is Siddhi/Siddham/Success – the eponymous Siddharth means the well-earned, everlasting happiness

¹ Susan L. Huntington, with contribution from John C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, Inc., 1985) pp.70-73, 87, 98-100.

² Aelian, *De Nat. An.* vii. 48.

called Nirvana. The truth then leaps onstage; captivity transcends, it proclaims: The body is a cage from which soul flies to freedom like a bird. The Bhuteshwar Sibi Jatakam pillar in the Indian Museum reveals that the bird soul then finds shelter in the bosom of the bountiful goddess (5.11c).

The dread of death is gripping; of course, none can avoid Mara forever. Mara is a bogey we never get to see in Buddhist art; the ever-lurking Mara known as Dharmaraja and Yama avoids any kind of macabre guise. However, where possible the opulent Yakshis on the gateway to heaven is assumed to be the demonic Mara's tempting daughters. A turbaned head from Gandhara with unusual fanged teeth and ferocious bulging eyes presumed to represent Mara typically represents the sword-wielding Yamantaka – the “Destroyer of Death” stands by the side of Buddha seated in the act of enlightenment (6.2). In Mahayana Tantric tradition it represents the fierce buffalo-headed Yamantaka–Vajrabhairava exterminating the obstacles to the realization of Siddhi in the Immense Luminosity of the goddess. A stamped gold disc ex-voto from the Oxus Treasure likely in the timeline of the Tillya Tepe burials depicts the earliest representation of the fierce Protector of Enlightenment and the Destroyer of Death. The puffed-up head of wrathful Yamantaka–Vajrabhairava has buffalo horns and wide pierced ears to be able to respond instantly – he is the only deity able to destroy the evil Shadow of Mara (6.3).



6.4a Gentle Glory – Buddha of Wisdom, Schist, H.38.74 cm, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2nd century CE
Peshawar Museum, Pakistan

6.4b Protective Dharmapalas, Schist, Gandhara, 2nd century CE
Lahore: Central Museum of Pakistan

6.5 Ligated Yamantaka–Mahakala, Sandstone railing, Stupa 2, Sanchi, 1st century CE

In Tibetan Buddhism Yamantaka–Vajrabhairava manifests the Buddha of Wisdom known as Manjushri meaning the Gentle Glory. Beginning with the Kalachakra foundation of the stupa, Dharmapala Mahakala Tantras is linked to Yamantaka–Vajrabhairava in perpetual union with his equally fierce Wisdom Consort Vajrayogini identified as the Ugra Tara, a form of the Hindu goddess Kali similar to Hecate haunting the graveyards.³ The eight Dharmapalas essential to Tantric meditation utilize iconography, mandala, mantra, rites, and invocation rituals. The origin of these highly evolved and complex Mahayana methods is in practice as evidenced by the descriptive Greco-Buddhist art couched in secretive symbols. An Enlightenment scene from Gandhara represents seated Buddha casting out wretched darkness of ignorance biting the dust. He is protected by the sword wielding Dharmapalas and the goddess depicted as the Tree of Wisdom

³ Rob Preece, *The Psychology of Buddhist Tantra* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publication, 2006)

(6.4a). In another fragment, the fierce but protective and compassionate “Destroyer of Death” is depicted as an armed and alert youth suffused by the “Gentle Glory” of Manjushri (6.4b). The extraordinary animal form of Mahakala Yamantaka–Vajrabhairava manifests in the symbolic lunette threshold on Bharhut stupa enclosure. Among the many faces of wisdom the rare ligated animal meant to purify and transform the mind depicts the deity as Mahakala the elephant striding on buffalo legs of Yamantaka (6.5). The crown of deer antlers represents the moon goddess Artemis known as Chanda Yakshi, the twin sister of Apollo who lends the sun-moon-disc to glorify the Enlightenment of the Buddhas.

A happy life beyond death’s inevitability is a recurring theme in Egyptian and Greek art. Buried in the cultural consciousness, the ancient motifs act almost as woodgrains of the mind. The lyre player, or the wine drinker that connects the living and the dead across time illuminate Buddhist art. Artemis the archer typically signified by a bow and arrow, a quiver and hunting knives often crouch in the vine scroll meander frieze from the stupa monument in Gandhara. Artemis the archer alongside syncretic Harpocratic Cupid and the Egyptian monkey god Thoth entwined in the vine bower suggests that the partial border slab in Peshawar Museum was fashioned in Alexandria (6.6). The deer sacred to the goddess surviving in ancient totemic and shamanistic rituals form a part of the bear cult in other Indo-European cultures in Anatolia, Phrygia, and Persia. The deer and bear cult is much in evidence in the golden Tillya Tepe royal burials in Afghanistan dated to early first-century CE.⁴ The probably Persian origin of the root of Artemis’ name (arta, art, arte) meaning “great, excellent, holy” acknowledges Mother Nature worshipped at Ephesus.⁵ The foundation of the lofty temple to Ephesian Diana the Great was laid on a bed of packed charcoal and sheepskins.⁶ At the foundation of the temple was discovered the sacred deposit of the controversial gold and silver “Phaneos eimi sema” portraying a grazing deer.⁷ The electrum coin is the earliest from the mint of Lydia then subject to the Persian Empire. The deer often confused with the caprid appears at the seat of Buddha along with the Wheel of Law of Retribution known as the Tibetan Bhavacakra or the Wheel of Life. The emblematic “Wheel and Deer” signifies protection and the just reward for Dharma and good Karma. The origin of Sudarsana-chakra and Srichakra lead to Sudarsana and Srīma Devata among several Yakshis in Bharhut stupa pledging marvelous afterlife.

Often it is the unseen terror of extinction that provokes the imagination about the delightful afterlife. An archer in a bower begins the vertical ascent of the figural medallions in a vine-scroll; the lower section on the door jamb has overlapping laurel leaves sacred to Apollo. Typically, the stiff overlapping laurel leaves of Crowning Glory stretch along the molding to divide the horizontal panels in Gandhara reliefs. The series of medallions with figures dwarfed by the lush grape clusters and vine leaves rise above the archer. A man treading grapes with a child on his back is followed

⁴ Andrew Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1887) pp. 209–210.

⁵ Charles Anthon, *Artemis. A Classical Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers. 1855) p. 210.

⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* XXXVI. 21.

⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 3: ch. IV. Herodotus gives an account of Phanes of Halicarnassus, a mercenary in the court of Cambyses, who guided him to sack the temple of Amun–Zeus in Egypt in the year 527 or 525 BCE. Phanes buried alive by a sandstorm, together with 50000 Persian soldiers is poignant since the Greek word “Phanes” also means light (or lamp), and the word “sema” also means tomb.

by a figure carrying a basket of grapes. Next to him is an amorous couple, and then a wine drinker holding a rhyton at the top.⁸ The vignettes have corresponding images in Egyptian paintings and the Roman mosaic. The door frame with outermost torus molding decorated with flattened bead-and-reel, dog-tooth, and meander pattern from Gandhara housed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts demonstrates how the arts of Greece and the wealth of Roman Asia joined together to furnish the extraordinary funerary monuments in South Asia destitute of any comparable tradition.



6.6 Artemis shooting an arrow, Schist, Sahri-Bahlol, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2nd century CE
Peshawar Museum, Pakistan

The Greco-Roman story of Androclus and the Lion is remembered as an actual incident whereas the fables of a Greek slave named Aesop (circa 620–564 BCE) have animals in a certain situation to offer a memorable meaning. Although similar to Aesop’s fables, the genius of Pali Jatakams (1st–2nd century CE) enlists supernatural beings to reaffirm rebirth. In comparison, the “Enlightened” Buddha after each fable affirms that Bodhisattvas in human-animal forms provides the way to overcome Mara and attain a new body filled with Immense Light. Chiefly, Maha Vihara Devi is enlisted through rituals to offer the ultimate solution by giving rebirth to the departed soul. In the mythological world the magic working “living images” are an essential part of problem-solving. The rejuvenation undergone by the images is not about the journey of a single life but countless eventful life journeys culminating in transcendence. When the spirit leaves the body it is called back to occupy the pure body of a child. The success of the preternaturally driven initiative is revealed by the shamanic men who present the precocious newborn instantly attaining Light to reach the avowed journey’s end in a matter of Seven Steps (6.7). Immediately after the newborn soul took the seven steps, celestial nymphs sprinkled flowers from the sky while nine dragons showered him with water. The luminous event took place under the Sala tree seized by Maya, which is curiously absent in this relief. In the modular conveyor process, the imageries aided by rituals and the mysterious reliquary caskets repetitively deposited in the womb of the stupa mound churn out and empower bundled up radiant embryos. But this particular strange relief has mysteriously veiled the vital medium of the Maha Maya Devi constantly involved in the final effort to revive and enlighten the departed. Certain evidence provided by sculptured reliefs from

⁸ Benjamin Rowland, *The Vine-Scroll in Gandhara* (*Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 19, No. 3/4 (1956), pp. 353-361.

Gandhara demonstrates that shamanic men along with the dedicated divine female performers assisted the crucial outcome of the Dream of Maya in the astounding birth of a Buddha (2.17,2.29).



6.7 The Seven Steps of the Newborn, Swat Valley, Pakistan, 2nd century CE



6.8 Apsaras summon a spirit, Prasenajit Pillar bottom, South gateway corner, Bharhut, 1st-2nd century CE
Kolkata: Indian Museum

The commemorative corner pillar on the southern gateway to the reliquary stupa at Bharhut displays tightly placed inscribed scenes in vertical panels that identify several personages and supernatural events. The pillar known as the Prasenajit Pillar is inscribed “Sadika Sammadan turam devanam” meaning: The attainment of splendor on the façade of faith/fortune/happiness/success. One of the panels at the bottom represents celestial dancers with a group of musicians playing a curved lyre imported from Egypt. The names separately engraved behind each of the four celestial dancers identify Misakosa, Subhada, Padumavati, and Alambusa. The Spirit Dancers call back the soul to enter the pure body of the newborn. Their success is demonstrated by the miraculous appearance of the diminutive boy dancing in the Chiatya-Vihara (6.8). Dancers and instrumentalists in the reliquary procession are crucial to the Rite of Soul-Recalling. This mysterious process in Bharhut stupa relief involves four female mediums with clasped hands seated in the rear. They are surrounded by a ring of musicians; using a range of vocal and instrumental percussion sounds together with the “spirit strokes” by the two women playing on a curved harp, expressive Abhinaya and Aangikam of the four professional dancers usher the spirit using bodily movements, gestures, and postures. The singers and dancers are a significant part of the structure of the Chaitya-Vihara funerary monument. The heavenly Apsaras carved in relief successfully beckon the spirit of Raja Prasenajit of Kosala shown rising above in his Roman quadriga to enter the heavenly mansion of the goddess. T. W. Rys Davids notes 24 spokes on the wheel of Raja Prasanjita’s chariot. Worshipers gather around the offering tables and altars dedicated to the goddess signified by Srichakra, Tree of Life, Triratna, Palmette, Palm tree, Stupa, Lion, Goat, Horse, and Elephant pillars.



- 6.9 Rajalakshmi, Good Glory, the Just (Agathocles Dikaioi), Bronze token, Afghanistan, 1st century CE
 6.10 Maha Vihara Devi Lakshmi Ma, Copper double-sided token, Sri Lanka, 1st century CE
 6.11a Brahmi letter Ma
 6.11b Ma-Triratna, Crescent and Star, Steatite disc, Kausambi, North India, 1st century CE
 6.11c Brahmi Ma, Winged bull bezel, Oxus Treasure, L.1.7 cm, Ø 2.25 cm, 11.5 gm, 1st century CE
 London: British Museum (124006)
 6.11d Triumph of Antinous holding Ma standard, Æ Cult Medal, Bithynia, 2nd century CE
 6.12a Savior Lioness and Deadman's head with Triratna stamp, Schist, Gandhara, 2nd century CE
 6.12b Savior Lioness with a revived man in a cave, Schist, Ø 11,2 cm. Sirkap, Taxila, 1st-2nd century CE
 Taxila Archaeological Museum (174/1932-33) Pakistan

Of all the tricks humankind employs to concoct the illusion of security, the most vital to transcendence is gender; the male venture capitalist movement harvesting spiritual benefits in the Buddhist reliquary cult is supplied by women clubbed together as nuns functioning as priestesses and sacred prostitutes dubbed courtesan dancers. The unearthly performers in Gandhara and Bharhut reliefs testify that when the whole of life comes to an end, the act of letting go does not take place. Instead, the heavenly Apsaras Alambusha turns out to be the divine mother of Raja Visala venerated in Vaisali stupa complex in North India. Besides Misakosa, Subhada, Padumavati, and Ahmbusa labeled on Prasenajit Pillar, celestial dancers named Urvashi, Menaka, Misrakesi, Subhadra, and Sudasana appear in Bharhut sculpture. They are described as Achhara/Aksara meaning imperishable, indestructible, fixed, and immutable. The celestial dancers are correlated to the spellbinding Mohini. A seductive dance form known as Mohiniyattam in Kerala in South India derives its name from Mohini, a female avatar of Vishnu who performed the “dance of the enchantress” to distract the demons from the Elixir of Life named Amrita reserved exclusively for the Devas in the realm of Indra.⁹ The Soul Summons by celestial maidens involves (A) Mohini Yakshi enshrined with two of her acolytes in the inscribed Ayagapata Homage Tablet dedicated to the departed Svamis Mahasatrap Sodasa in the Year 42 in Kankali Tila at Mathura (7.17).¹⁰ The performance of Apsaras in Bharhut sculpture resembles the traditional temple dance preserved through the centuries in Tamil Nadu. The religious dance and music now known as Bharata Natyam were originally known as Sadir, Chinnamelan, and most commonly Dasi Attam denotation the sacred dance of the Devadasi dedicated to the temple. Chinnamelan means performance in a small assembly, while Sadir (திறமை; பெருமை; பேறு) has a wide range of meaning: talent, expertise, glory, beauty merit, gift, prize, reward, and boon. The 2nd-century

⁹ Harriet Ronken Lynton, *Born to Dance* (Hyderabad, India: Orient Longman, 1995) p.7.

¹⁰ Ramaprasad Chandra, *Memoirs of the archaeological survey of India*, no.1-5, 1919, p. 22.

Tamil epic Silappadikaram mentions the technique, teaching, repertoire, and even the maiden recital of a dancer called Arangetram.

While certain aspects of Mahayana Buddhism amplify Hindu culture, numerous Greco-Roman features atrophied and died out or altered seamlessly. The morphology of some of the features in Buddhist art has a fascinating history. For instance, the arched lyre with the underside of the soundbox shaped like a ladle is the ancient Egyptian harp which has survived in the tombs. The stringed African lyres like the Kora and the Adungu Harp of Uganda derived from Egypt once flourished in Persia. Egyptian influence in Persian culture is inevitable due to the two periods of Achaemenid occupation (525–404 BCE and 343–332 BCE) and Sassanid conquest of Egypt (619–629 CE). The Kushan goddess Nana/Nanaya identified with Persian goddess Anahita is the goddess of fertility and protector of the kings. The goddess branded with lion symbol comes from the Sumerian tradition of warrior goddess Ishtar-Atargatis similar to the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet personified as a lion. In the Tocharian Greek Rabatak inscription discovered near Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan, Kanishka the god-king (circa 78-115 CE) singles out Nana and acknowledges that he “obtained the kingship from Nana, and all the other gods” in the vast Kushan pantheon. Nana typically represented by a lion and crescent moon on her brow coexists with Ardoksho, Rajalakshmi, and Gajalakshmi. Nana attested by name on Kushan gems and coins is depicted as a lion on a votive coin of Sapadbizes.¹¹ Goddess Lakshmi appears with the lion on the votive tablets from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka (6.9, 6.10). Rajalakshmi holding lotus bud with the lion on reverse inscribed Agathocles and Dikaioi unfolds the goddess as “Good Glory” and “The Just” – Agathocles is typically misunderstood as the name of a Greek king who ruled around 190-180 BCE.

Triratna ensign integrating paired fish enface with superimposed lotus and celestial discs transcribes Prakrit Brahmi letter “Ma” invoking the moon goddess of Purnima worshiped as Lakshmi (6.11a). At the moment of its creation, pilgrims from all over the world thronged the Hieropolis of moon goddess Ma of Comana situated in Cappadocia. Customarily, the sacred footprints worshiped as Sripada and Budhpada emblazoned with Triratna represent the moon goddess. Triratna alternating with crescent moon placed between the starry rays on a disc stone is one of the earliest gems-like ex-votos to invoke Dwaralakshmi at the doorway to the next world (6.11b).¹² The polished lathe-turned sandstone discs and rings ranging from about 4 to 6 cm in diameter display strategic design for continued existence that include acanthus of regeneration and the frontal nude figure of the goddess resembling Syrian Astarte. Comparatively rare in Taxila, the gemstones carved with geometric precision on the visible face are mostly found across early Buddhist sites in North India.

The symbols in Buddhist art are designed as logos; the acanthus of regeneration, like the circle, and the Swastika is a symbol of the sun. A variety of religious signs of the goddess fall into different categories of birds, reptiles, animals, and plants with corresponding color and number

¹¹ Arputharani Sengupta, *Buddhist Jewels in Mortuary Cult: Magic Symbols* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2019) vol. 1, pp. 250, 260, figs. 5, 13, 5.32. ‘2 vols.’ A Kushan period Jacinth gemstone (W. 0.20 mm) with engraving of Nana-Nanaya reclining on a lion in the British Museum is a splendid invocation to the goddess.

¹² Agrawala, P.K., *Ancient Indian Mother–Goddess: Votive Discs* (Varanasi: Books Asia, 1993)

symbolism, which in turn generate diverse meanings. Triratna and Srivatsa incorporate fish; Makara-Capricorn, elephant, peacock, cobra, deer, horse, lion, griffin, goat, and dragon allied to the Yakshi redefining human-animal relationships. While the spiritual value of the symbols derived from nature exposes its magical roots, the hereditary craftsmanship reiterates interdisciplinary gold working and stone carving. The multiskilled progenitors converting stone into embossed gold are from the tradition of ancient Egypt, where the sculptors' workplace was called the "Place of Gold" the incorruptible gold \odot equal to the immortal sun is the chief material fashioned under one roof. The knowledge and skill of jeweler-sculptor are revealed by the Triratna insignia of the goddess inscribed on a gold ring from the Oxus Treasure. The Aramaic derived seed letter firmly places the "Ring of Eternity" in the Kushan period. And despite the retro style of the winged and crowned bull on the bezel, the stirrup-shaped hoop of the gold ring is surely Roman (6.11c). It transpires that among various whispering symbols the Triratna-Ma is an important facet of the Imperial cult that became a great force behind the unprecedented Cult of Hero and Cult of Tomb in South Asia. The Triratna-Ma standard carried by deified Bithynian youth Antinous who drowned in the Nile in 130 CE signifies triumph over death (6.11d). The departed Antinous, the beloved of Emperor Hadrian (117-138 CE), with a huge cult following in Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor, apparently entered South Asia in the form of Bodhisattva together with the Triratna-Ma emblem. Without exaggeration, a confiscated frieze from Gandhara is a petrified page from lost mythology and esoteric rituals. A corpse with Triratna stamped on the head is liberated by a lioness that transports the body to be resurrected in a secret man-made cave (6.12a). A votive offering plate from Taxila reveals the happy; the revived man lives in eternal bliss with the lion-goddess in her cave mansion (6.12b). These rare illustrative images demonstrate the corpus of what goes unsaid in the Buddhist cult. The importance of distinguishing what the image describes and what the texts omit to say can be filled in only by visual evidence.

The departed walk in the footprints of the goddess, and automatically the shadow footprints of the goddess worshiped as Sripada is broadcast as the Footprints of the Buddha. A heavy diptych altarpiece repatriated to Pakistan enshrines the sacred footprints in an impressive aedicule supported by three Corinthian cippi depicted alongside the memorial frieze in Gandhara (6.13).¹³ The magnified footprints are adorned with sacred symbols. Between the Triratna toes and soles is the Srichakra or the Wheel of Law or Retribution called Dharma Chakra, Swastika, and the Lotus of rebirth. The swag looped at the top with aquiline garland bearers is derived from Roman Asiatic Garland Sarcophagi traced to a Phrygian workshop near the ancient quarry of Dokimeion in Asia Minor.¹⁴ The evidence of Anatolian origin suggested by the motifs is clinched by the immense power of the moon goddess Ma; Roman emperors, kings, and people of Pontus worshiped in her sanctuary at Comana (Pontica), famous for its priestesses and sacred prostitutes rewarded by kings and favored by merchants from Armenia.¹⁵ During Strabo's lifetime, religious cults of the Pontic

¹³ Stolen in 1982, Kaku collection (Ancient Art Taiyo Ltd., Tokyo) Confiscated by Home Land in New York, Asia Week, 2016, and repatriated to Pakistan.

¹⁴ Jaś Elsner Janet Huskinson (Ed.), *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin, DEU: Walter de Gruyter, 2010)

¹⁵ Stephen Mitchel, In Search of Pontic Community in Antiquity, In *Representations of Empire: Rome and the Mediterranean World*, Alan K. Bowma (ed.), Published for The British Academy (Oxford, New York: Oxford University press, 2002) p.57. 'pp.35-64'

region inherited from Achaemenid times was favored by kings to reinforce their legitimacy. This imperial tendency is much in evidence in the cash-rich Greco-Buddhist mortuary cult.

During a period of fusion, the lion symbol is not unique to Nana and Lakshmi; the cult of transgender Bodhisattva along with the Greco-Phrygian goddess Cybele signified by lion spread from Anatolia to the stupa complexes in South Asia. A magnificent gold belt with nine discs embossed with Cybele riding a lion adorned the prince buried in Tillya Tepe Tomb IV. The “Nirbjaya” gold medal buried near the head of the prince depicts the Wheel of Law and the Triratna alongside the lion symbol of the goddess (2.13). The “Nirbhaya” votive coin inscribed in Kharosthi proclaims: “The lion who dispels fear” [ob: Sih(o) vigatabhay(o)] and “The one who turns the wheel of righteousness” [rev: Dharmacakrapravata(ko)]. Whether stamped on a metal plate or carved in a piece of stone the emblematic Triratna ushers the sacred presence of the goddess. The Mathura Lion Capital from Saptarishi Tila is an offering table carved with Triratna arising from the coiled tendrils. The Triratna altar elevated on the adorsed lion pedestal is inscribed in Kharosthi common in Gandhara (6.14). The scrawl covering the entire Kirtimukha block, including the surface surrounding the hole at the bottom mentions Sodasa, Sarvastivadin, Visnu, Saka, Sakya, and Gotama. The eponymous name attributed to Buddha also denotes the Gou Mata (Tama) known as Kamadhenu and Surabhi. In Hindu mythology, the celestial cow goddess appeared from the churning of the cosmic ocean of milk (Samudramanthan) that brought forth Gajalakshmi and the pot of Ambrosia, the elixir of immortality. The description of the cow mother goddess is equal to the river of milk flowing from the Egyptian cow goddess Isis-Hathor.



6.13 Sri-Ma Diptych Altar, Schist, H.106 cm, 226.796 kg, Swat Valley, Pakistan, 2nd century CE

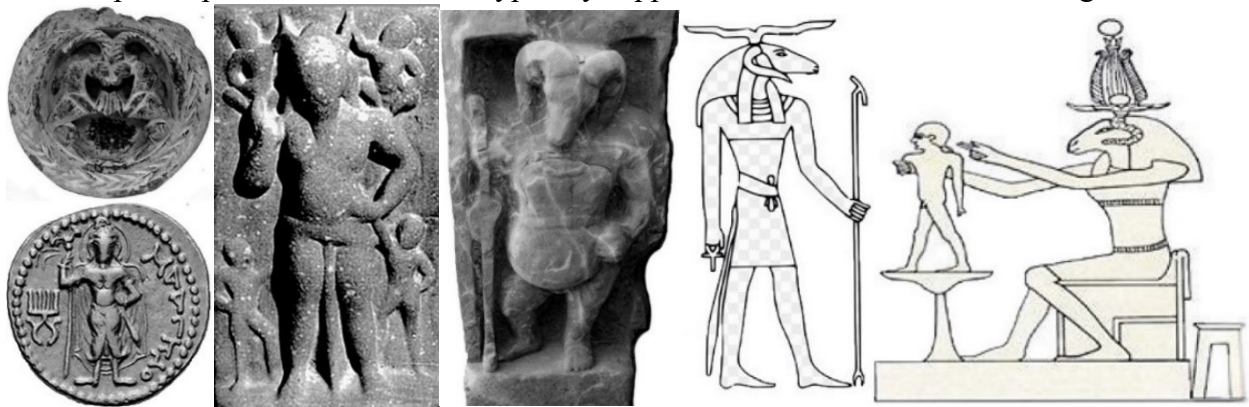
6.14 Mathura Lion Capital Altar, Sandstone, 34 x 52.5cm, Saptarishi Tila, Mathura, 1st–2nd century CE
London: British Museum (1889.0314.1)

6.15 Adorsed Lion Altar, 25 x 70 cm, Gokamesvar Tila, Mathura, 1st–2nd century CE
Mathura Archaeological Museum (3266)

6.16 Sphinx Capital Altar, Sandstone, 49 x 34 cm, Mathura, 2nd century CE
The Russek Collection, Panasia Gallery AG, Zurich

Though the Mathura lion capital is unique, the adorsed lion composed with rosette, palmette and beads-and-reel design is notable on the pillar capital of the gateway to the Bharhut stupa discovered by Alexander Cunningham in 1973. The lion often appears together with the

Greco-Roman acanthus of regeneration, an idea reverberated by the winged figure emerging from the addorsed lions carved on an offering table from Mathura (6.15). It represents Aker, ancient Egyptian earth, and an underworld god. The Egyptian iconography of the merged lion pair facing east and west is a hieroglyphic sign for the “horizon” and sunrise. Greco-Buddhist mortuary cult is based on the premise that the dead emerge from their grave. The “unspeakable awe” of this miracle is worthy of contemplation; the ritual worship of the mastaba and the stupa abode of the goddess is captured in several Buddhist reliefs. The Mathura Lion Capital in the British Museum is similar to the dispersed tomb altars shaped as anterior Acanthus capitals widespread in Gandhara, reaching as far as Ai Khanum in Afghanistan in the Greek frontier of Central Asia. Simultaneously, the immense monolithic oracular pillars erected at great cost in the Indian subcontinent gathered worshipers at the funerary complexes filled with reliquary stupas. Several of these pillars polished like a mirror typically support the lotus and lion seat of the goddess.



6.17 Coupled caprid libation plate, Schist, Gandhara, 1st-2nd century CE

6.18 Mahasena as Naigamesha/Agni (Μαασηνο/maaseno), Kushan gold coin, Huvishka (126-164 CE)

6.19a Naigamesha Prajapati, Sandstone niche, Mathura, 2nd century CE

6.19b Naigamesha, Sandstone niche, Mathura, 2nd century CE

Mathura Archaeological Museum (00-E-2)

6.20a Egyptian creator god Khnum with twisted horns of a ram crowning his goat's head.

6.20b Khnum, the Divine Potter molds an infant out of clay from the Nile on his potter's wheel

A range of Buddhist deities seemingly ‘Spiral Jetty’ into the breathtaking sinew of Egyptian pantheon orchestrated exceptionally in the Buddhist landscape. The addorsed sphinx on a capital altar from Mathura supports rearing lions framing a demi-divinity having serpents for legs supposedly having Persian origin. This type of Anguiped often found on magical amulets from the Greco-Roman period is characterized by Abraxas to symbolize new dawn or rebirth (6.16). Much of animal symbolism in the Buddhist cult has facets of knowledge that are inseparable from a profound respect for beneficial nature with roots in magic. The most common kind of Anguiped occurs in an offering plate from Dharmarajika stupa in Taxila. Anguiped “Vyala Yaksha” considered to be a nature spirit recurs in early Mathura sculpture.¹⁶ The allegedly benevolent mythical Yaksha and Yakshi accompany Kubera of prosperity. Jainism names twenty-four protective Yakshas.

¹⁶ Abraxas offering tray, Schist, Ø 11.2 cm, Dharmarajika stupa, Taxila Archaeological Museum (1801932-33), (Francfort-79). Anguiped Vyala Yaksha, Sandstone, Mathura Archaeological Museum (42-2944), 1st century CE

A wide range of animals classed as “spirit animals” have a kinship with the nature spirits. Animals linked to astrology and the geomantic aim at spiritual triumph. Amongst the grave goods the wild goats, caprids, ibexes, and deers with tangled “Tree of Life” antlers often fashioned in gold spread so far in different directions that trying to classify them becomes a taxonomy problem. It is ibex galore in the golden burial mounds of the Scythian steppe warriors. The invincible mountain goat conquering the heights in the sky is an aspirational motif that inevitably seeps into Tillya Tepe necropolis and Gandhara. Encircled by a laurel wreath the caprids with great priapic horns balanced in a libation plate signifying fertility and plenty is a superlative offering to the dead (6.17).

Counting the BOΔΔO gold Dinar of Kanishka there are almost thirty deities represented in the bilingual Kushan coins inscribed in Greek. However, after Huvishka (circa 126-164 CE) the deities dwindle to just Ardoxsho holding cornucopia and Oesho, a wind god identified as Shiva. The reliquary deposits suggest that the prestigious Kushan coins were produced by the priestly god-kings as exclusive objects offered in the fulfillment of a vow. A rare Kushan Huvishka coin depicts Naigamesha with goat head inscribed Maaseno identified as Karthikeya, the son of Agni (6.18). Known as Skanda and Kumara, Kartikeya was born when Agni dropped his seed into the Ganges. An early image of Agni and his son Kartikeya appear on a sandstone stele found at Katra Keshav Dev in Mathura.¹⁷ Kartikeya meaning “of the Krittikas” is related to the myth of being fostered by the heavenly Pleiades called the Seven Sisters represented by seven cows in Egypt. Kumara holding spear corresponds to the child god Horus who leads the celestial army to battle the evil forces threatening the resurrection of Osiris, the night sun negotiating the dark sky.

Agni and his consort Svaha are invoked in the sacrifices to the gods. Agni is a powerful Triglav deity that spans the earth and the sun in the lightning.

They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni,
and he is heavenly-winged Garutman.
To what is One, sages give many a title,
they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.

— Rigveda 1.164.46 (tr.) Klaus Klostermaier

Agni or Aggi in Pali permeates the Buddhist texts.¹⁸ In “Sainika heresy” Buddhist tradition Agni ignites sudden Enlightenment of Atman or Soul as opposed to the idea that Enlightenment is gradually attained through the actions of the Bodhisattva.¹⁹ In ancient Jainism, Agni or Tejas contains the soul of fire-bodied beings that appear as Agni-kumara or “Fire Princes” equal to the radiant Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.²⁰ Agni from Latin Ignis at the root of English Ignite is represented by the fiery ram. The goat-headed deity called Naigamesha, sometimes represented

¹⁷ Mathura Archaeological Museum (40-2883)

¹⁸ T. W. Rhys Davids; William Stede, *The Pali-English Dictionary* (London: Pali Text Society, 1905) pp. 4–5.

¹⁹ Wayman Alex, *Untying the knots in Buddhism: Selected essays* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997)

The six heretical views on Indian philosophy are described in the Samannaphala Sutta of the Digha Nikaya in the Pali Tipitaka. The Six Heretical Teachers known as Six Sramana, Six Tirthakas or false teachers shows sectarian divide in Mahayana Buddhism.

²⁰ Chapple Christopher Key, *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006) pp. 31, 43–44, 56, 173–175.

with the head of a ram or deer, appears to be an aspect Agni. Asvalayana Grihya Sutra (1.12) addressed to Naigamesha for the wish fulfilment for a son. In a votive altar from Mathura Naigamesha associated with the procreation of sons is surrounded by children (6.19a). The deity's commitment to provide male offspring is linked to sanctified rebirth. In an aedicule the goat-headed Naigamesha (Nejamesa/Naigameya) with curved horns holds the staff as a symbol of power and dominion, the wide-spread of his belly signifies prosperity. The realistic goat-head resembles the sturdy mouflon (*Ovis aries*) that originates from the Mediterranean islands of Corsica and Sardinia (6.19b).



6.21a Naigamesha Nemesa beam (ob., Sandstone, L.61 cm, Kankali Tila, Mathura, 1st-2nd century CE
Mathura Archaeological Museum

6.21b Naigamesha beam (rev), L.61 cm, Lyre players and dancing Apsaras, Mathura, 1st-2nd century CE

The connotation of Naigamesha linked to Agni riding the ram resonates in the ancient Egyptian god Khnum with the goat's head crowned by the twisted horns of a ram (6.20a). Khnum originally guarding the source of the Nile signified by two goddesses represented as deer is a creator god. Khnum is related to the deity Min in human form with erect penis and upheld right hand in what is termed Abhaya Mudra. The name of the creator god Khnum meaning "builder" described as the "Divine Potter" and "Lord of created things from himself" formed other deities and the children of human beings from the clay brought by life giving Nile. He fashioned them at a potter's wheel and placed the double of the human body in the mothers' wombs (6.20b). His significance led to early theophoric names of him for children, such as Khnum-Khufwy "Khnum is my Protector", the full name of Khufu, the builder of the Great Pyramid of Giza.²¹

The theriomorphic counterpart of Khnum is the goat-headed Naigamesha seated on low throne with a male child and three goddesses standing by his side (6.21a). The inscription "Bhagavad Nameso" invokes Divine Nameso, a variant of Naigamesha, the Lord of procreation that bestows coveted sons.²² The apocryphal Khilani hymns in the Rigveda invokes the deity: "O Nejamesa, fly hither again bringing a beautiful son; to my wife, who is longing for a son, grant thou an embryo, and a male one." Vincent Smith believes that Naigamesha turns his head towards Indra on the broken side of the relief from Kankali Tila.²³ It was at Indra's command that the revered Nemeso called Harinegamesi in the Kalpa Sutra transferred the embryo of Mahavira from

²¹ Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, USA: Oxford University Press. 2000)

²² Buhler, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.II, 1892, p.314, pl. II.

²³ Vincent A. Smith, *The Jain Stupa and other Antiquities of Mathura* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1901) pp.25,26, pl. XVIII. The reference in the Kalpmutra to "a low Brahmanical family" is of interest.

the body of Brahmani Devananda to the womb of Kshatriyani Triela. The awesome goat-headed embryo switching deity bracketed as benevolent over and above malevolent is regarded as the son-granting protector of children. The transmission of iconography in the mortuary cult can be understood only by considering the intersections between healing, ritual, and religious belief. The ram or goat signifying fire is a symbol of the sun and we may assume that dance is a solar ritual, which is associated with a group of ideas—fertility, light, and reincarnation. The reverse of the slab represents female ritual dancers and musicians rejoicing at Naigamesha's son-granting embryo transferring feat. The same dancers and celestial musicians playing lyre and drum in the Bharhut relief establish their contemporaneity (6.21b).



6.22 Naigameshi mother goddess, Sandstone, Mathura, 1st-2nd century CE
Mathura Government Museum (00-E-2)

6.23 Zoomorphic Naigamesha shrine, Sandstone, Bodh Gaya, 1st-2nd century CE (Huntington Archive)

6.24 Naigameshi with curled horns, Ivory, H.10.4cm, Chandraketurgh, West Bengal, 1st century CE

6.25 Winnower Yakshi copulates with Naigamesha, Ivory, Chandraketurgh, West Bengal, 1st century CE

6.26 Winnower Juno Caprotina, Polychrome terracotta aedicule, Etruscan-Roman, 1st century BCE-CE

Duality – The body is in the spirit, after the Great Departure how to reenergize the body is the quest. Buhler points out that the four mutilated goat-headed icons in the Mathura Museum puzzled Cunningham. Two of them are male Naigamesha, and two others female Naigameshi personified as foster-mother hold on the lap a male infant in a dish (6.22).²⁴ It is as if a prestidigitator had placed fertile eggs and sperm together in the Petri dish filled with a magical substance that created an environment to help the supernatural embryo grow. After three to five days later, perhaps the fertilized embryo would find its way into an incarnate Yakshi's uterus. Anyhow, the "goat-headed" or "ram-headed" Yakshi compliments Naigamesha for the wish-fulfilment of a son. The anthropomorphic nude Yakshi conscious of her power to procreate stands with a male child at the high altar to the goat-god; both display Abhaya Mudra. In the sensory realities of the human plane this curious interlude at the top of a Vedika pillar in Bodh Gaya suggests popular cult rituals related to the goat (6.23). Theriomorphic Yakshi with goat-head is related to the Tantric goddess Vrishanana among the sixty-four Yoginis in the divine sphere of medieval North India. A splendid goat-head carved in ivory from the flourishing cult center at

²⁴ Cunningham, *Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1878-79. Vol. XX, p. 36, Plate IV. No record has been kept of the locality in which these curious images were found.

Chandraketugarh indicates the status of Naigameshi. The ivory head is crowned by a starry lotus and the neck is adorned with a zig-zag band signifying fertilizing water and rebirth. A hole at the rear of the head is probably for the attachment of a gold-disc halo (6.24).²⁵

An ivory winnow from Chandraketugarh signifying fertility and agricultural prosperity provides the tray on which Naigamesha in zoomorphic form copulates with a Yakshi. A series of perforated beads shaped like dotted circles hem the winnow to herald germinating sunlight (6.25).²⁶ Curiously, the Etruscan goat goddess is also enshrined in a winnow shaped aedicule. In this case the smiling horned head of the deity represents the Roman goddess Juno Caprotina implied by fig and cornucopia, which is the horn of the goat Amalthea that suckled the infant Zeus (6.26). While the cornucopia saturates Greco-Buddhist culture, the wild goat cohabiting with the goddess in Mesopotamian religion persisting in the Buddhist Kushan period is significant. Ishtar signified by the sacred palm tree and eight-pointed star is united with Tammuz (Dumuzi) the goat god of fertility embodying the powers of new life in nature. The goat seeks the articulated scaly mountain summit crowned by the crescent in the sky. The symbolic motif is recurrent in the ceremoniously buried silver ex-votos known as punch-marked coins. The ancient Babylonian imagery of the sacred mountain coexists with the mythical principle of fenced sacred tree planted beside shrines and tombs.

Abreast of the mountain churning the milky-ocean for the elixir of life Gajalakshmi eagerly holds out her left breast. The enduring goddess standing on a pot of Amrita brimming with loti compares with the Egyptian goddess Isis offering nourishment in life and in the next world (6.27a). The dead do not remain dead; they merit rebirth. The Goddess who grants all your wishes is Sri. By accepting to resuscitate, the fertility goddess worshiped as Santana Lakshmi bestows her favors as the mother; she is also the delightful Comfort Queen in the afterlife. Sri depicted as Gajalakshmi and Salabhanjika at the Torana gateways is Sorkalakshmi in the Indralok aspired by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The counterpart of Vaikuntam where Vishnu resides. Men with the honorific Sri title gain “possession” of Sri Devi, which the universal Dhampati or divine lovers represent in early Buddhist art. Likewise, the Chaitya-Vihara mountain mansions in which Maha Maya Lakshmi resides is Srinivas (Nivas–residence) at the core of Sri Balaji cult in Andhra Pradesh.

The netherworld or Patal is the domain of Nagalakshmi represented as a hooded cobra; the anguiped goddess typically has five heads on an expanded hood (6.27b). As a fiery and protective mother goddess, Isis too takes the form of a cobra with inflated hood. Sometimes Isis and Nephthys shown as two cobras protect and nourish in afterlife. In this Roman period funerary stone, Isis and Osiris (Serapis) with the body of a serpent flank Horus-Harpocrates. The child god of new dawn holding cornucopia of abundance is seated on the lotus of rebirth (6.28).²⁷ A man under the protection of Nagalakshmi is being escorted by a pair of Nagakanya on the Vedika of Bharhut stupa. As usual, Sri Lakshmi stands on the lotus on either side of the medallion so that the content

²⁵Enamul Haque, Chandraketugarh: A Treasure Trove of Bengal Terracottas (Dhaka: Self Published, 2001) pl.967 (APNY#M2288)

²⁶ Enamul Haque, Chandraketugarh: A Treasure Trove of Bengal Terracottas (Dhaka: Self Published, 2001) pl. C 964 (APNY#1208)

²⁷ In a similar polychrome limestone stele, Isis and Osiris (Serapis) with body of a serpent with a Canopus between them is Greek-Roman period, Time frame from 332 BCE to 395 CE, Leiden, Museum of Antiquities (F 1960/9.1)

and its intent is explicit (6.29). Among the zoomorphic avatars the cobra associated with goddess Isis has a long history in Egyptian religion. As the Uraeus symbol for the goddess Wadjet, the protective cobra depicted on the forehead of the king and queen takes up her new position behind the head like the innovative sun-disc halo, also derived from Egypt. The symbols derived from the Greco-Roman Egypt gives an idea of how the Buddhist world, conditioned by the continuously variable physical dealings, is resolutely anchored in the constant measure established over thousands of years. The truth is, the medium, techniques, and references in early Buddhist art and architecture are deeply rooted in ancient Egyptian culture, but the execution, agenda, and the subject matter are specially crafted to conform to the new Buddhist mortuary cult.



6.27a Gajalakshmi, Inscribed sandstone medallion, Bharhut, 1st-2nd century CE

6.27b Nagalakshmi, Sandstone medallion, Southern pillar of East Torana, Sanchi, 1st-2nd century CE

6.28 Nagakanyas convoy, Sandstone vedika, Bharhut stupa, 1st-2nd century CE, Kolkata: Indian Museum

6.29 Isis and Serapis, Harpocrates on Lotus, Polychrome limestone, Roman period, Ashmolean Museum

A panel on the Prasanjit Pillar depicts Padmavati in Padmalaya standing on the head of a multi-hooded cobra representing Nagalakshmi; the awesome display is pointed at by a distinguished person standing in the lotus pond. The benevolent goddess of the three realms and the guardian of treasures represented in human and symbolic forms is surrounded by the Nagas or the serpent spirits of the Patal located in the southern region. The frieze inscribed Erapato Nagaraja Bhagvato Vadate depicts Nagaraja named Erapato worship at the tree altar where the homage tablet is strewn with flowers (6.30).²⁸ Exalted Nagalakshmi (Bhagvato) represented as the Tree of

²⁸ Susan L. Huntington, Aniconism and Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look (*Ars Orientalis*, Vol.22, 1992) pp.115-116, fig.1. 'pp. 111-156' Vidya Dehejia, Rejoinder to Susan Huntington (*Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 22, 1992) p. 157. Both the arguments advocating the absent Buddha overlook the presiding goddess.

Life receiving worship (Vadate) sanctifies the Nagaraja and his two queens from the watery realm called Bhogawati, the city of enjoyment. Chakavako Nagaraja protected by the five-headed cobra canopy in the land of delight is commemorated as a pillar statue west of Bharhut railing. Dharma Rakshitasa Danam inscribed in Brahmi at the top invokes the goddess of retribution worshiped as Danalakshmi bestowing wealth (Danam) and protecting the just and righteous (Dharma Rakshitasa). Chakavako Nagaraja in the circular mandala wears the protective torsade-style twisted-knot kundela matching the adornment of Sudarsana Yakshi and Srma Devata pillar statues. The tutelary pair Chakavako Nagaraja and Sudarsana Yakshi in the “House of Eternity” were given by Kanaka the goldsmith.²⁹ Compared to the hieratic form of the pillar statues, Erapato Nagaraja appears in a scenic sanctuary surrounded by six-legendary Sirisa or Acacia linked to rituals and religious beliefs associated with goddess Isis represented as Acacia in Egyptian art. The tree goddess offering food and water in the Buddhist reliefs at Bharhut and Sri Lanka was first pointed out by Ananda Coomaraswamy in *Yaksha* (1928).³⁰ The iconography has antecedents in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Even now, Acacia in Africa signifies shade, water, and food, among other things. Customarily, the cobra goddess is propitiated at the anthill altars, which is the entrance to the underworld. The propitious form of Nagaraja and his retinue in the sanctuary of Nagalakshmi continues in the form of Naga stele called Naga Kal in Tamil. These ex-votos with carvings of snakes are worshiped under the Banyan/Pipal tree named Bodhi illuminating the denizens of spirit world. In such open-air community altars, the Nagakanya is invoked for the bestowal of progeny, which is synonymous to rebirth. The cobra is the guardian of wealth, wisdom and enlightenment; the serpent deity associated with Apsaras and the nymphs preside over rain, rivers, ponds, and the trees in the garden of many delights.

Vidhura Pandita Jatakam — Surrender Life and Gain Life Eternal (The Jataka, Vol. VI: No. 545)

The Prasenajit Pillar at the corner of the south gateway of Bharhut stupa displays important scenes tightly arranged in panels. On one side is the goddess descending from heaven represented by the Tree of Life and Sripada spanning the ladder (4.5). Among a number of personages and events labeled in Prakrit Brahmi is the Vidhura Pandita Jatakam. It shows Vidhura hanging on to the tail of Punnaka Yaksha's flying horse dragging him into the Patal. The allegoric story demonstrates the wisdom of willingly accepting the inevitable journey to the Patal so as to be able to regain life in the land of the living: The wise and eloquent Vidhura was indispensable to Dhananjaya the king of Indapatta. The fame of Vidhura's wisdom spread like perfume to the three worlds; it overwhelmed the Naga queen who “desired his heart” so much that the Nagaraja in the underworld arranged to obtain Vidhura's heart. Therefore, Punnaka Yaksha on a flying horse arrived in Indapatta to obtain Vidhura in a game of dice. King Dhananjaya was induced to gamble when Punnaka wagered his wondrous horse and a magic gem. Punnaka's supernatural horse sparkling with jewels from ear to hoof could walk on water, stand on the palm of hand, and sprint across the narrow city wall. And his miraculous lapis lazuli created amazing other worlds, living things, and gathered the sun, the moon and the constellations. Dazzled by the magical horse and gem, the king

²⁹ Arputharani Sengupta, *Buddhist Jewels in Mortuary Cult: Magic Symbols* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2019, Vol.1) p.24, figs.1.43, 44. ‘2 vols.’

³⁰ Arputharani Sengupta, Torana goddess gateway to heaven, In *Buddhist Art and Culture: Symbols & Significance* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2013, Vol.2) p. 172, figs. 8.24 a,b, 8.25. ‘pp.156-177’/ ‘Vols.2’

bet all his possessions except his body and his white umbrella. Since Punnaka's magic dice was loaded, even the guardian goddess, the king's mother in his previous birth, could not prevent Vidhura being taken as a trophy. Then, Punnaka instructed Vidhura to leave behind his pleasant life and leap to death by taking hold of the tail of his flying horse. The righteous Bodhisattva born as Vidhura was fearless; he gripped the horse-tail as he was dragged across thorns and boulders, but survived the ordeal to reach the distant Black Mountain. Punnaka Yaksha could not kill Vidhura even by his dreadful masquerades and more trickery. Finally, when the Yaksha was about to fling him into the void from the top of the mountain, Vidhura understood that it was not his corporal heart but his perceptive heart that the Naga queen desired. At that instant Vidhura revealed the wisdom in his heart and converted Punnaka Yaksha. Together they journeyed to the Naga kingdom lapped by the sea, where Vidhura seated on a throne proceeded to impart wisdom. The Nagaraja, the Naga queen and the Naga princess in the underworld took refuge in the wisdom of his heart. At the end Vidhura was sent back to the world of the living, and Punnaka Yaksha wed the Naga princess as reward. As usual, this story is narrated in the Hall of Truth to ensure favorable afterlife.

Vidhura Pandita Jatakam reveals much about serpent lore associated with a range of Yaksha and Yakshi and the underworld surrounded by the sea located in the south. An episode from this unusual parable shows enlightened Buddha alongside a psychopomp address a gathering in a boulder strewn cavern presided by the Naga divinities. The royal Naga couple in the Patal displaying certain iconographic conventions appear in both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic form. Harpocrates, the child-god of rebirth, appears within the lotus petals crowning the commemorative pillar monument typical of Gandhara sculpture (6.31). The mythological beings come from an expansive pantheon. For instance, the Greco-Scythian Kushan under whom the Buddhist funerary cult flourished are the legendary sons of a serpent woman and Hercules. According to the Pontic Greeks, Hercules searching for his horses in a Woodland near the Black Sea came across an anguiped serpent woman in a cave. One of the three sons born from their union succeeded in the Heracleian task of drawing the bow while he put the girdle on, and as decreed by Hercules became the forefather of Scythians called the Heracleidae. Hence, to be gathered back into the realm of the serpent deities is like going back to the lap of the Great Mother in the ancestral home.



6.30 Nagaraja Erapato worships in a sanctuary, Sandstone, Prasanjit Pillar, Bharhut, 1st-2nd century CE

6.31 Vidhura Pandita Jatakam, Schist, Gandhara, 2nd century CE (e-Auction/ TimeLine Auction, London)

6.32 Sri Lakshmi and Kumaradevi lustrate newborn soul, Schist, Gandhara, 2nd century CE

Lustration is part of religious liturgies; the symbolic elephants lustrating Gajalakshmi comes from ancient temple rituals that has existed in Egypt. A lustration scene with an overseeing

sphinx on a cylindrical faience seal from Kalibangan designated as Indus valley culture corresponds to vignettes in the Egyptian Book of the Dead.³¹ Lustration with lifegiving water is accompanied by ritualistic utterances, studied gestures, and the use of symbolic objects. A relief from Gandhara depicts sanctifying men and divine females form a ritual circle around a radiant newborn to show man's journey through life and the quest following death (6.32). One of the two men pouring water from a pot holds a double wedge-shaped object. So does a man standing next to the image labeled the "First Seven Steps of a Newborn" from the Swat Valley (6.7). Thus, the double ax-shaped emblem customarily held next to the radiant togate Buddha is not exclusive to the shaggy psychopomp attired in Roman slave costume identified as Hercules (3.5). On the contrary, it is an absolute insignia of renewed life. Given the right historical conjecture, to the rhetorical power of symbolizing nationalism, the representational double-wedged object doggedly displayed in Greco-Buddhist art could be the double wedge-shaped Roman silver ingot. The double-axe type Roman silver ingots from the Balline Hoard in Ireland is a substantial proof.³² Out of four double wedge-shaped silver ingots, one is broken and three bear stamps with inscriptions (6.33). Apart from its intrinsic value, the wedge-shaped silver ingot might signify wealth expended to ensure happy afterlife. Also, silver signifies the moon goddess worshiped a Selene, Diana, Chanda, Purnima and Sri Lakshmi. Having identified the object and its import, possibly, the psychopomp potently bearing payment for Charon the ferryman, to cross the river Styx, enhances celestial influence. The ritual context of the Roman silver ingot comes from a find in September 1777 reported by John Britton in 1810.³³ Workmen digging the foundation of a building in Middlesex discovered a Roman wall underneath which was a double-axe silver ingot and three coins, one of them that of Aracdius ruling the Eastern Roman Empire, and other that of Emperor Honorius (388– 400 CE), the brother of Aracdius at the end of the Roman rule in Britain. The double wedge-shaped silver ingot stamped EX.OFFIC.HONORII at the center in two lines weighed ten ounces, eight grains. The ritual deposit included a small glass crown, a ring shaped from shell, a type found in Taxila, and a stone slab (81.28 x 71.12 cm) inscribed DIS MANB' T. LICINI ACANV'S F.³⁴

It has to be noted that so far there is no direct evidence of the double-ax silver ingot in the Indian subcontinent, only the shape of a contemporary Roman ingot to infer from. By inference, the so-called oxhide sign on the portals of the Chaitya-Viharas in Bharhut reliefs shifts Nagalakshmi from the subterranean cavern to the Chaitya-Vihara. A panel on the Bharhut Prasanjit

³¹ Arputharani Sengupta, *Buddhist Jewels in Mortuary Cult: Magic Symbols* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2019, Vol.2) pp.384, 385, figs.7.41,42. '2 vols.'

³² Clodagh Lynch, Roman Silver Ingots from the Balline Hoard, Co. Limerick (*Classics Ireland*, Vol. 21-22 (2014-2015) pp. 138-156.

³³ John Britton, *Beauties of England and Wales or Delineations: Topographical, Historical, and Descriptive*, Vol. X, Issue 1 (London: W. Wilson, 1810) p.92. '18 multi-part volume'

³⁴ DIS, a Latin prefix meaning "asunder" has a privative, negative, or reversing force. Manber denotes an ancient Roman; a native or inhabitant of Latium. And a Roman named Licini belonging to the gens Licinia was a celebrated plebeian family at Rome, which appears from the earliest days of the Republic until imperial times, and which eventually obtained the imperial dignity. LINTEUM means linen, cloth, canvas, and separately F may stand for 'filius', meaning 'son'.

Pillar at the southern gateway reveals enthroned Naga couple in a vertically sliced chamber welcome the departed in an imaginary plane. Right below, a hopeful enters through the lotus and punch-marked coins bordering the arched doorway displaying the oxhide sign on either side of the Torana (6.34). The Buddhist pantheon evolved from multiple sources. The multiethnic foundation of Mahayana Buddhist culture is attested by the syncratic system of signs and the different styles. Apart from the iconographic peculiarities, the recurrent Nagas and lotus alongside the Greek prince, and the awesome technology of glossy polish given to the mega sculptural scheme in rare purple sandstone suggests Egyptian involvement at Bharhut.

Considering the importance of the goat deity in the funerary cult, the so-called oxhide sign repeated on the Hellenistic Corinthian pillars and pilasters in Gandhara sculpture certainly seem to signify the goatskin aegis of Amaltheia, a goat-tending nymph (Yakshi) occasionally represented as the goat that nurtured infant-Zeus in a cave in the Cretan “Goat Mountain” Aigaion. When she died, Amaltheia’s goatskin taken by Zeus in honor of the nurturing “tender goddess” became the protective aegis. The so-called oxhide sign resembling four legs stretched from the skin constricted at the middle is a popular shape for the copper and zinc ingots produced in Cyprus (6.35b). The goatskin aegis contributes to the tenet of fecundity and rebirth; a late Bronze Age bronze figurine from Cyprus depicts a spear-wielding protective deity wearing a horned conical cap stand on the goatskin pedestal (6.35a). Buddhist material culture confirms that Punic-Cyprus with its centuries old contact with Egypt and Anatolia inherited the Imperial cult of Rome and passed on its customs and rituals centered around the cult of Venus equivalent to Sri Lakshmi, also churned from the ocean.



6.33 Broken silver ingot, Balline Hoard, Co Limerick, Ireland, Roman period
Kildare: National Museum of Ireland

6.34 Chaitya-Vihara, the abode of Nagalakshmi, Sandstone, Bharhut, 1st-2nd century CE

6.35a Protective deity with goat-horns stands on goathide, Bronze, Enkomi, Cyprus, 12th century BCE
Nicosia: Cyprus Museum

6.35b Oxhide/ Goathide copper ingot, Uluburun Shipwreck, Late Bronze Age
Bodrum Museum, Turkey

6.36a X-rayed goat-hoof on a ram at food trough, Copperplate, Mohenjo-Daro, Proto-historic Period

6.36b Goat hoof-shaped gold ingot, Western Han Tomb of a Marquis, Jiangxi Province, 1st century CE
Shaanxi Provincial Historical Museum

6.36c Goat-hoof/womb-heart-shaped amulets, Taxila and Harappan sites, AE? , Early Historic Period

6.37 Mother goddess Naigmeshi with a kid offers the Cup of Life, Schist, Gandhara, 2-nd century CE
London: British Museum

The goatskin aegis linked to mythology, religious belief, inborn wisdom, and existential experience extends to the caprid ex-votos. The utopian grave yard of Mohenjo-Daro is dominated by the Great Stupa. The manmade citadel has yielded wide variety of votive offerings among which the brilliant etched copperplates are incompatible to Bronze Age. A caprid with curly horns at food trough has x-rayed goat-hoof etched on its stomach (6.36a). The propitious sign provided for the afterlife is found in the utopian tomb of Marquis of Haihun in Han China in the form of hoof-shaped gold ingots (6.36b). Nearly fifty of them were found among around 20,000 artefacts excavated in 2011 in the northern part of Xinjian in Jiangxi. The shape of the talismans with Chinese scripts are of particular significance due to Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) who changed the name and shape of the gold coinage according to his vision of the auspicious white qilin unicorn and a “heavenly” horse. The Kushan’s cultural contact with Han China is attested by the votive deposits found in the Begram hoard and the replication of the hoof-shape in variety of amulets and bangles in the Indus Valley, Taxila and Tillya Tepe necropolis (6.36c).

The efficacy of apotropaic goatskin and goat-hoof signs in early Buddhist art is confirmed by the crowned goat goddess enthroned with the Cup of Life. The kid cradled in the crook of her arm express the primal force of her maternal nurturing nature. The goddess clothed in tunic and himation is in the Greco-Roman style of Gandhara (6.37). The health benefits of goat's milk in practice and in medical anthropology holds a special place in South Asia. In healing practices, the special status of goat herds in Lachung area, a secluded estate of the queen of Sikkim, is due to a traditional life style in accordance with religious beliefs. The traditional healer is part of the community; across the border in Nepal, the revered goat dedicated to the goddess is released in the sanctuary of Hariti living with her 500 sons west of Svayambhu Stupa in Kathmandu. The traditional healers from the Newar farming community in Nepal are respected god woman (dya maju) and godmen (dya ju) in direct contact with Hariti.³⁵ The Vajracarya offers food and wine at the Hariti shrine and performs “Pouring Puja” (Chahaykegu). Death is as sure for that is born, as birth for that is dead; The same crossroad site receives both funeral and afterbirth offerings. It is also where the female healers perform ritual sacrifice in South and Southeast Asia. The female and male healers and shamanic mediums consecrated to Hariti are described as the Patra or Vessel of the goddess. The deity taking possession of the Vessel termed Dubina denotes surrender, giving-in, allowing access. The spirit can take human or animal form including that of a goat or tiger.

Hariti inherits Demeter’s attributes in Gandhara. Greek goddess Demeter is signified by cornucopia of abundance, which is Amaltheia’s goat horn that nourished and protected Zeus. Once, Demeter transformed herself into a mare in order to escape Poseidon’s embraces. While she grazed with other mares Poseidon transforming himself into stallion and forced her to mate with him. Demeter with head of a mare kneels in a grotto on the base of a pillar altar from Mathura depicting hyperactive Bacchants in Arcadia (4.35b). This unusual Greco-Roman cult object in sandstone was likely installed alongside the life-size Hariti in the Saptarshi funerary mound near Mathura. The goddess is distinguished by a crown of wreath with fluttering ribbons. Her long-plaited hair

³⁵ Linda Iltis, Knowing all the gods, grandmothers, god families and women healers in Nepal, In *Daughters of Hariti: Childbirth and Female Healers in South and Southeast Asia*, (eds.) Santi Rozario, Geoffrey Samuel (London: Routledge, 2002)

is bound with pearls and flowers (6.38). The amazing “Lady with Mantle” known as Kambojika, Queen of Rajuvula, was found at the same time and place as the Mathura Lion Capital by Bhagwanlal Indraji in 1869 (6.14).

Buddhist art operates on different levels. First, it supports popular belief in re-incarnation and in supernatural beings, which allows the treatment of non-humans as human beings or transforms human forms into animals. And since deities too take the form of animals and act like humans, boundaries blur so that animal, human and divine blend in the human domain to reveal the wisdom of important philosophies. There is a pattern in all things; whether Gandhara, Andhra or the belt stretching from north to northeast in India, everything in the Buddhist mortuary cult is connected during the period. And instead of being riven by division Buddhist mortuary cult is a “crucible” in which the dominant worldwide concepts and religious beliefs are connected and molded to take a new form. Hariti holding cornucopia resembles the earth goddess Demeter promotes agricultural property, her son Plutus denoting wealth corresponds to Kubera. The bond between Demeter and her daughter Persephone demonstrated by sculpture from Anatolia is central to Eleusinian Mystery linked to agrarian cycle (6.39). The younger woman wearing chiton and himation pulled over her head, holds her hand to her heavy heart and leans towards her companion. A folded fan deprived of promise rests between them. The diademed matron seated on a cushioned and draped couch, with her feet resting on elaborate footstool, comforts the maiden. Their clothing and fixtures are consistent with figures represented in Gandhara.



6.38 Hariti/ Queen Kambojika, Life-size stone statue, Saptarshi Tila, Mathura, 2nd century CE
Mathura Archaeological Museum

6.39 Demeter and Persephone. Polychrome terracotta with mica, Myrina, Anatolia, circa 100 BCE-CE
London: British Museum (1885.0316.1)

6.40 Demon abducts a maiden, 6.2 X 5.5 cm, Chandraketurgarh, 1st-2nd century CE

6.41 Demeter and Persephone/Necklace of Thread, Schist, Gandhara. Pakistan region, 2nd century CE
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)

The earth grieved with Demeter when the goddess in disguise searched for Persephone abducted by Hades into the underworld, the land of the dead. A terracotta plaque from the cult center in Chandraketurgarh shows an entity hidden in verdure look at a demon abducting a maiden,

who instead of struggling seems to enjoy the experience (6.40). A similar mold-made ex-voto reported from Kausambi in North India represents a goblin with pointed ears spirit away a comely female.³⁶ When Persephone was allowed to return for a period of six months, with the impending separation looming for the rest of the year, the joint worship of the mother and daughter in religious cult practices gave hope of revival and annual reunion with one's ancestors. The contextual view of Demeter and Persephone unfolds a complex symbolic system related to Hindu rituals. The mother and daughter bond celebrated in literature and cult practices endures in the Autumnal Durga Puja followed by Lakshmi Puja celebrated with age-old rituals in West Bengal. Surely Vrat Kathas give a hint of the Homeric Hymns that rejoice: Queen of fragrant Eleusis, Giver of Earth's good gifts, give me your grace, O Demeter. you, too, Persephone, fairest, maiden all lovely, I offer song for your favor.

A Greco-Roman figurative sculpture from Gandhara represents a matron contemplate a string of pearls held by a maiden. Giving in to the trend of labeling images from Jatakam tales, the Greco-Roman womanly pair is captioned The Necklace of Thread from Maha Ummagga Jatakam (Jataka No. 546). But the intricate story about the great escape of a newlywed royal couple and crafty tunnels has nothing to do with the stunning image of Demeter and Persephone. Perhaps the string of pearls is a metaphor for the counting of days and months for the looming farewell caused by the six pomegranate seeds that Persephone ate in the Hades (6.41). Perhaps the new Elysium chosen as Gandhara suffused with fragrance or Mathura flowing with honey is unconceivable due to a combination of cultural evolution, nationalism and geographic fixation. Despite tell-tale attributes identity of Greco-Roman sculptures is consistently botched or steadily blanked out probably due to ethnically induced impairment in cognition.

At this point it is worthwhile to take a look at Maha Ummagga Jatakam not because of the incongruous captioning of the Hellenistic Demeter and Persephone. The Jatakam is amazing for its contemporary account of palace intrigues, espionage, double secret agent, smear campaign, land-grabbing, bribery, blackmailing, tunneling, warfare, abduction, ship and palace building. The clever minister Mahosadha used guilty secrets to leverage enemies' cooperation: Senaka had killed a courtesan, Pukkusa had a leprous spot on his thigh, Kavinda was possessed by a Yaksha named Naradeva, and Devinda had stolen the king's precious gem. Mahosadha posted these facts everywhere in the city, and the next day went boldly into the palace to negotiate. Through false accusations, he also undermined the credibility of Kevatta, the purohit and councilor of Brahmadatta, king of Kampilla.

Maha Ummagga Jatakam — Story of the Great Tunnel (The Jataka, Vol. VI, No.546)

An assistant to a potter named Mahosadha was known for his problem-solving skills. He became the trusted councilor of Videhas, the king of Mithila. Only Mahosadha could correctly answer the questions posed by the deity residing in the king's parasol. At the age of sixteen he married an equally sagacious Amaradevi who protected him from palace intrigues and helped him with her parrot that revealed baffling secrets. Mahosadha's parrot passing through Uttarapaacala overheard

³⁶ Abduction, Terracotta plaque, 6.2 X 5.5 cm, Kausambi, 1st-2nd century CE, Vinod Kanoria Collection, Patna
Joachim Karl Bautze, *Iconography of Religions* (Leiden, New York, Koln: EJ Brill, 1994) pl. XXXIVa)

Brahmadatta, king of Kampilla, and his purohit Kevatta, conspiring to capture the whole of Jambudipa. In a plot to kill Videha, the poets sang the peerless beauty of Brahmadatta's daughter Paacalacandi. The ruse worked. Videha of Mithila sent a proposal to marry Brahmadatta's daughter. Mahosadha understood the false negotiations, and as a countermeasure he secretly prepared two tunnels, one grand and the other smaller, with an escape route to the ships waiting in the Ganges. While Videha as a guest of Brahmadatta was being entertained in a special resort at Upakari, Brahmadatta sieged Mithila. As counter measure, Mahosadha on a pretext fetched Brahmadatta's queen mother Talata, the queen Nanda, and princess Paacalacandi into the smaller tunnel and conducted Videha to safety into the larger tunnel, where the members of Brahmadatta's family met him. Then Paacalacandi of Kampilla was placed upon a heap of treasure and married to Videha in the underground. On emerging from the tunnel, together with Talata and Nanda, the newlywed couple boarded a waiting ship, and escorted by a fleet of 300 ships sailed to safety. But Mahosadha remained in Uttarapancala to make peace; when Brahmadatta arrived the next day with his army to capture Videha, Mahosadha revealed the secret tunnels and explained the auspicious marriage that had taken place. Brahmadatta peacefully acknowledged his alliance with Videha and accepted the friendship of Mahosadha, who returned to Mithila, taking with him Brahmadatta's dowry for his daughter. The queen mother and the queen of Brahmadatta returned to Uttarapancala, and the two kings lived in great amity.

The notion that "We are living even when we are dead" offers a place for bold experimentation and critical thinking. With the first centuries monumental commissions, the artists, chiefly jeweler-sculptors and ivory carvers linked by common thread in the present, focus on the imagination's role in accounting for the future supposedly linked to a past estimated to go back to the imaginary genesis of the Buddha in about 563 BCE. In the deep-down recollection, the goddess dominates the Buddha. The rich details and refined Greco-Roman style classify the enthroned mother goddess from Yusufzai dubbed Buddhist Madonna and Notre Dame de Tourfan by Foucher (6.42).³⁷ The royal ex-voto reverently transported to Gandhara depicts the goddess staring off in solemn remembrance, her tunic and mantle cascading in an easy rhythm. Her crown of wreath very similar to the one adorning Augustus Caesar points to its derivation and early date. The curious curls at the center parting like the rosette with six heart-shaped petals highlighting her crown and upswept coiffure are part of the peerless signs. Her long-sleeved tunic is closed at the neck by an ornate neckband; from the shoulder to the gold cuff bracelet a row of paired pearls clips the stylish ruche fabric of the sleeve. Carvings from Palmyra often parade such fancy sewing. An infant cradled on her lap clutches the unique tripartite-pearl necklace looped between her breasts. The Chinese are particularly adept at stringing pearls in multiple ways. Her matching clustered pearl drop-earrings look like Hellenistic okra-shaped gold earrings. Her thick rounded bracelet has cabochon gem set next to granulated gold flower. The equally ornamental anklets are embossed with a flower between cross-hatched leaf pattern.

³⁷ Alfred Foucher, (tr.) Thomas L.A. et al., *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and Other Essays in Indian and Central-Asian Archaeology* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972) originally published in 1910, 1914.

In appearance, the mother goddess from Yusufzai is Isis Lactans prototypical of Madonna widely popular in the Roman world. Her frontally posed lovely gentle face framed in wavy hair gazes at the worshipper drawn to the newborn on her lap promising rebirth. The robust child seated between her feet is Plutus, the Lord of wealth conceived by Demeter and Iasion in a thrice plowed field. In a twinkle, the goddess suggestively points to her child to establish herself Demeter acting as an intermediary to the underworld. To the right, the Gemini twins called Dioscuri by the Greek wear off-shoulder tunic and wrestle below Isis' newborn sun god Horus-Harpocrates. The anthropomorphized Greco-Egyptian child-god Harpocrates is recognized by his side-lock; as the holder of the secrets of the grave, he ushers silence by placing his right forefinger on his lips. On left, curly-haired Aion seated on the foreground is judiciously larger; he cradles a circular dish holding the planets shaped like beads to signify eternity. By his side stand two other personifications, one of whom perched high might be Asiatic Eros holding a sacred parrot noted for prophecy and posturing of love. Standing next to Eros is youthful Dionysus, the god of wine and religious ecstasy, identified by pine cone on his forehead and a drinking bowl in the crook of his left arm. The goddess seated on a low stool with turned legs rests her feet on a block with the carving of a broadleaf inside a compressed dentil-and-drop border. The group of global offspring on either side appears on a pedestal with roughly carved lotus petals signifying resurrection. Pointedly, each one of the child gods that make allegoric curtain call on the platform of the goddess is represented in diverse compositions in several early Buddhist sculpture. While personification and allegoric orchestration through symbols is a Greco-Roman device influenced by Egypt, the multi-figure group of sculpture was a Hellenistic innovation.



6.42 Mother goddess, Schist, 77 X 42 cm, Ø 14 cm, Yusufzai, Pakistan, Circa 1st century CE

London: British Museum (1886,0611.1)

6.43 Tyche and Roman prince, Schist, 27 x 24.7 x 10.3 cm, Takht-i-Bahai, 2nd century CE

London: British Museum (OA 1950-7.26.2)

6.44 Enthroned Hariti and Pancika with Hecate, Schist, Gandhara, 2nd century CE

Hariti with attributes of Demeter dominates the remarkably regimented necropolises in Gandhara. The goddess cradling a cornucopia is enthroned with a Roman prince holding a cup of wine in a group sculpture from Takht-i-Bahai meaning the 'Good Hub' in Pakistan. Similar to Italic Fortuna, Tellus or Tyche the iconography of Demeter is the precursor of various Buddhist

goddesses holding cornucopia. In addition to a diadem, Demeter-Hariti wears a cylindrical polos crown of Greek goddesses. Her erotically voluptuous body and her hand suggestively hovering above the lap of her consort conveys endless conjugal delight in Arcadia (6.43). The syncretic *interpretatio graeca* in the centralized Greek composition employs a Roman type of personification in which the child at the knee of the goddess is more specifically a symbol of fertility. The prince personified as Dionysus drinks from the cup of the divine female; the wine cup was part of religious ritual in which initiates entered Babylonian and Mithraic Mysteries. Dionysus in Elysian Mystery was the last god to be accepted into Olympus and the first to appear with Demeter in Greco-Buddhist reliquary cult. Focus upon the couple moves to mature Plutos holding a money purse at the center. It then circles down to the luxurious foot cushion where slavish opulence crouches in the manner of Eutychides' personification of affluent River Orontes. at. Apart from a passion for antiquities, it is evident that secret doctrines are best conveyed by innovative design. The jeweler-sculptor takes pride to counterfeit the original ornaments and clothing. The goddess wears huge drop earrings and bangles. Draped in a cloak and short tunic the prince wears a light, low-heeled slipper shoe called *soccus* in Latin (Gk. *Sykchos*). The Persian or Turkmen footwear ideal for repose is designed to create the look of bare feet is like the mitten, with one compartment for the big toe and one for the rest. Associated with formal dress, knee-high socks are worn with shoes, usually as part of a Roman uniform.



6.45 Agathocles Dikaios votive coin with genuine Roman portraiture, Æ, Afghanistan, 1st century CE

6.46 Buddha enshrined on perpetual Dharmapala plinth, Schist, Gandhara, 2nd century CE

(e-Auction) Ardoksho

For six months Persephone is balanced between the earth and the underworld, on the edge of what could have been the end. Instead, the myth of Persephone turns the cycle of death and rebirth in the Greco-Buddhist cult into the spinning Wheel of Law. Demeter, the consort of Saturn,

joins her daughter Persephone, to preside over the sacred law, and the cycle of life and death. The funerary cult is highlighted by the Threefold Goddess; Demeter searching for her daughter Persephone was joined by Hecate, the powerful goddess of the underworld (Chthonia), guide and companion (Propolos), guardian (Propylaia), goddess of women (Kourotrophos), and Light-Bringer (Phosphoros). Hecate, the goddess of transition and magic appears as the torch bearer by the side of Demeter wearing kalathos crown. The palla similar to saree is draped modestly over left shoulder of Hecate depicted in hierarchical scale (6.44). The Roman prince enthroned with the goddess deserves to be glorified “Agathocles Dikaïos” meaning Good Glory and the Just or Righteous inscribed on a variety of obols found in Afghanistan. One type of votive coin with Greek legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ (Baselios/King Agathocles) carries genuine Roman portrait of a diademed man in profile mistaken to be a king of Bactria. “Agathocles” essentially enables “glorification as a just reward” and the term Baselios designating a spiritual leader during the early Christian period continues to identify the head of the Syro-Malankara Church. The diademed man probably represents a cult figure or a priest dedicated to the cult of Hecate, the goddess of the underworld. On reverse, between the parallel Greek legend Agathocles (Good Glory) and Baselios (Chief), the icon of Hecate Phosphoros raising a torch in both hands to dispel the darkness in of the grave is held by a partly draped, unearthly figure (6.45). The allegoric bearded man holding the stick of augurer spears the earth as the symbol of supreme power (Hasta summa armorum) and to portend the fertility of the earth as ethnological examples show.

The goddess is the vital force critical for survival beyond the grave. The radiant Buddha on lotus serenaded by angels in an aedicule realizes ascent to heaven due to the contemplation of the perpetual couple on the plinth. The enthroned couple represent a memorialized Roman prince and Demeter typically identified as Hariti. The prince holds a torch raised up like the torch-bearer Cautes attending Mithras in the contemporary Roman cult of Mithraism originating in Persia. The clue to unusual Buddhist iconography comes from the practical lesson learnt from Hermann Goetz that South Asia echoes whatever takes place in the west.³⁸ The consort of Hariti is called Pancika denoting the chief of the Yaksha army. Pancika is also associated with Khubera. Hariti in turn is identified with Romanized Ardoksho, the Central Asian goddess of abundance akin to goddess Lakshmi and the Persian goddess Anahita. However, the iconography of Hariti compared to the Greek Tyche or the Roman Fortuna is analogous to Demeter, the Greek earth goddess linked to the underworld. In Tantric Buddhism Pancika and Hariti are commonly referred to the “Lord and Lady of the Cemetery.” From Tibet to Odisha Siddhacaryas furthered the spread of Tantric Buddhism in which Tara the green goddess is Hariti. The Tibetans call Hariti “Heart Ravishing” (Yid-phrog-ma), while both Chinese and Japanese acknowledge her as the Mother of Demons and the Giver of Sons. Hariti devouring infants before being transformed into a loving mother goddess is similar to the legend of the Punic mother goddess Tanit in charge of the cemeteries called Tophet in Carthage. Tanit who allegedly gobbled up infants sacrificed to her gained universal worship as Venus Celest in the Mediterranean region. The Punic goddess worshiped in the western Mediterranean as Dea Caelestis was absorbed by the Greeks into Indo-Greek goddesses.

³⁸ Hermann Goetz, *Studies in the History, Religion and Art of Classical and Medieval India*, (ed.) Hermann Kulke (Weisbaden: South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, 1974)



6.47 Simurgh prow of a fish-shaped boat, Sandstone, Great Stupa 1, Sanchi, 1st century CE

Suddenly, brand new literature, art, and architecture grew in lock-step with resurrected Buddha allegedly retrieved from a trackless sixth-century BCE: To walk the earth and traverse the skies in an era fermented by the Risen Christ. A deductive will latch onto the puzzle of bilingualism, and the Aramaic derived neo scripts bringing literacy to the pristine South Asian Arcadia presided by the over the top Hariti relentlessly offering the cornucopia that once nurtured infant Zeus. The emblematic peacock in Buddhist art represents Lakshmi as much as Hera, the Queen of Heaven enthroned with Zeus. On the Sanchi Torana a fantastic fish-shaped boat with a prow in the form of Simurgh transports a sacred relic across the air and ocean.³⁹ The Simurgh originating in Persia and widely represented in Buddhist art represents goddess Isis during the Roman period (6.47). As Hermann Goetz observed, “Indian art, like all aspects of life can be understood only with the whole historical background of its time in mind. Beginning with “Imperial Rome and the Genesis of Classical Indian Art.”⁴⁰ At this point it is wise to conclude this essay with a story recited in the Hall of Truth, an unusual idiom ethnologically related to afterlife in Egyptian culture: We learn that the Jatakams are scripted for theatrical shows with scenery, music, and dancing. The stories in mixed prose and verse normally recited on fixed feast days at

³⁹ John Marshall, *A Guide to Sanchi* (Calcutta: Government Printing Press, 1918) Although Rajagriha and Vaisali would not have existed in 6th-century BCE, this relief created in 1st-century CE is usually captioned “Buddha crossing Ganges from Rajagriha to Vaisali.”

⁴⁰ Hermann Goetz, *Imperial Rome and the Genesis of Classical Indian Art: Part 1 (East and West, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sept. 1959), pp. 153-183*

the social gatherings known as Samaja, which was a regular institution. As if through a translucent screen the Jatakam tales reveal a highly evolved civilization.

Mora Jatakam — Writing on Inscribed Gold Scroll (The Jataka, Vol. II, No.159)

A fusion of folklore and superstition takes place in the Mora Jatakam discussed in the Hall of Truth. A queen longing for the flesh of a golden peacock died. The king declared on a Gold Scroll: "A golden peacock lives in the Himalayas on a golden hill at Daṇḍaka. Whosoever eats it gains eternal youth and immortality." "So be it" said the peacock, "but giving you eternal youth and immortality means that I must die! After all, there is a reason for my magical golden plumes. Once I was a powerful king of this country; I kept the Five Commandments, and made all the people of the world follow the same. Hence, after death I could ascend to the world of the Thirty-Three gods and enjoy afterlife in Sukhavati. In my next birth I became a golden peacock when the commandments maintained by me was weighed against my sins." This surprised the king who demanded proof. Then the peacock pointed out his jeweled car that once used to take him flying in the air but now buried beneath the lake behind the palace. When the king dug up the car, he understood the truth: "Nirvana is eternal, all else, being composite in their nature, are unsubstantial, transient, and subject to life and death. The Bodhisattva concluded by saying: "Ananda was the king, and I myself was the Golden Peacock." Then the Bodhisattva after a while rose up in the air, and flew back to the golden hill of Daṇḍaka, with a parting word of advice--"O king, be careful!" And the king kept the Bodhisattva's advice; and when he passed away after giving alms and doing good, he was rewarded according to his deeds.

After all, the belief in immortality comes out of the foremost awareness of death personified as Mara. In the ancestor worship the sculptures installed on the funerary monuments are offered in fulfilment of a vow; the exponential growth of the stupa result in countless dedicatory reliefs and statues. Dominating them all is the goddess, the "Mistress of Animals" – a term first used by Homer to describe female divinities associated with animals. Usually the term Potnia Theron in Greek draws attention to Artemis and the relationship between the goddesses and the animal. The concept of a mother goddess as the "Mistress of Animals" has existed in prehistoric religion; in early historic Buddhist cult the Yakshi fits this frame. As the source of all life the Yakshi depicted as Gajalakshmi holds out her breast; as the mistress of animals the goddess stands on various animals both real and mythical. The fantastic composite animals include hippogryph, makara, multi-headed cobra, aquatic elephant and winged griffin, indicating that her genesis from the deep ocean is combined with the heavenly sphere. But her close associations with animals are with the cobra, regal lion, the bull, the horse and the royal elephant, which could also mean divine coupling and fertility; hence goddess riding a tiger accompanied by her consort suggests powerful sexuality. The nudity of the goddess and control over animals is also an attribute of a dangerous adversary that needs to be propitiated and transformed into patroness of men. It is precisely this dimension of the divine female that imbues Buddhist ex-votos with protective power.